

AN
ESSAY
—K—
ON THE
JUSTICE
OF
GOD.

*Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily
he is a God, who judgeth in the earth. PSALMS.*



L O N D O N :

Printed for J. JOHNSON, at No. 72, in St. Paul's
Church-Yard. 1773.

[Price SIX-PENCE.]

AN
E S S A Y
ON THE
J U S T I C E



G O D.

There is a reward for the righteous & equity
as is a God who dwells in the earth. Psalm 112.



L O N D O N :

Printed for J. Johnson, at No. 7, in St. Paul's
Church-yard, 1775.

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An ESSAY, &c.

MEN, in delineating the divine attributes, have too generally blended with them all their own imperfections. Their several, separate interests, and contradictory passions, have led them, even under the character of *the One God*, to represent to us almost as many different gods, as impeached the wisdom, disgraced the worship, and sullied all the glory of the antient Greeks and Romans. Nay, the same persons, in their very *Harmonies*, have represented one attribute, as a flat contradiction to another. Blind and presumptuous creatures! It is well for yourselves, that your jarring systems cannot at all affect the real character of the Supreme Being. To the joy of the whole universe, whatever you have said, and whatever you may still say, *God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

But, should it be still asked, To what causes are we to ascribe the monstrous misrepresentations of the Deity which daily occur? After what has been said above, I need only reply, Is not the cause quite obvious? Or, if desired to explain myself more particularly, I would observe, That men,
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instead of seriously consulting the works and will of God, and hence inferring what his perfections are, have, on the contrary, regarded only their own tempers and inclinations, and, to vindicate all the follies and impieties arising from these, have endeavoured to persuade the world, that the peerless Jehovah is *altogether such a one as themselves*. As men have been interchangeably actuated with different malignant passions, they have proportionably represented to themselves a God, who would be pleased with such worshippers. And thus have they, at different times, endeavoured to divest him of his most honourable perfections: they have repeatedly, indeed, been so glaringly inconsistent with themselves, as to adore him, in the same breath, as *the Father of all mercies*, and as *a Being without any mercy at all*, that is, a *reprobating God*.

But, of all the perfections of the ever blessed God, his justice has perhaps, in general, been the least understood. However, under no other characteristic whatever, has he been so shockingly misrepresented and blasphemed. The justice of God, indeed, has been frequently described in such a light, as supposed him dispossessed of every endearing excellency, as declared him not the Friend and Father, but the merciless Tyrant of the universe, and as led us to think upon his holy name, not with hope, confidence, and joy, but with all the trembling horrors of despair. Men, in vindicating what they called the Justice of God, have too often lost sight of his goodness; nay, have entertained and propagated such ideas of justice, as absolutely militated against the possibility of goodness, and as forbad us to consider him as at all merciful, gracious, compassionate, forbearing, and long-suffering. This has been always the case, when

when justice has been represented as an essential obligation, or unchangeable disposition in the Supreme Being, to punish every the least offence, iniquity, transgression, or sin, in every rational creature, or, when by saying, that 'God was just,' it was meant, that, 'there was no forgiveness with him, without an equivalent satisfaction.' But, the bare mention of such an idea of justice, must, I should think, convince every rational being, that it is false. It must be plainly seen, that justice, in this light, or, rather in this darkness, is only another term for rigour, for inflexible rigour, and implacable severity; a character that we detest even in man, and which we cannot therefore apply to the infinitely adorable God, without being guilty of the most outrageous impiety. It must, I say, plainly be seen, that if justice signified rigour, God could not be just and good, at the same time: for the one is as contrary to the other, as light is to darkness. This will be evident, from the universally allowed acceptation of the terms.

In the first place then, goodness implies, it is well known, that benefits are bestowed without the prospect of any return. But rigour implies, as the proverb goes, that *nothing is done for nothing*. Again, the goodness of God implies, that he is not strict to mark our iniquities. But rigour, if this could be supposed to be one of his attributes, must make him punish, with exact weight and measure, every failing, not excepting the smallest, of which any being is guilty. Hence, then, it is obvious, that those who understand, by the justice of God, his unchangeable disposition not to pardon the least violation of his laws, without an equivalent satisfaction, inasmuch as they thus declare, that

there is no forgiveness with him, expressly declare, at the same time, that he is neither merciful, nor good. Nor do they at all alter the case, by supposing that he will accept that debt from another, which the delinquent himself is not able to pay; for, this is still supposing, that there is no forgiveness with him, or that there is no goodness with him, for a good being must have forgiveness in himself. Accordingly, we never ascribe forgiveness, or goodness, to the man, who insists upon the whole of his debt, and who will never be satisfied until the whole is paid, though he should consent, at the same time, to accept this debt from another besides the person who owes it; for, by accepting it even from another, he has all he could demand, and all he could form any pretensions to have a right to receive. Nor do we ever ascribe any merit or praise to such a man; these are due only to him who paid the debt, not at all to him who received it to the full, though from the hand of a third person: Surely, then, we cannot compare the ever blessed God to such a man; we cannot divest him of goodness; we cannot represent him in a light that would fix a reproach upon any of his imperfect creatures. We cannot suppose, that there is any goodness or mercy in the universe, if not with him, the fountain of the whole. We cannot suppose, that any of his creatures are more benevolently disposed than the great Creator. We must suppose that, if there be any love, any tenderness, or compassion, in any being whatever, these must reside, in their infinite fullness, in the Almighty and everlasting God. Rigour, therefore, cannot be one of his attributes. His justice must be such, as renders him the object of our most delightful contemplation.

temptations, and as is consistent, therefore, with all his other most glorious perfections. This, I shall now endeavour to shew, is not only the doctrine of reason, but is likewise deducible from the whole volume of scripture.

To this purpose, then, a fine field for satisfying all our enquiries is opened to us in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Genesis, which, from the twentieth to the end of the thirty-second verse, expressly treats of the justice of God. *The LORD said, to Abraham, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me, and if not, I will know *.*—And Abraham drew near, and said, *Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee, to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO RIGHT?* And the Lord said, *If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, who am but dust and ashes. Peradventure, there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's*

* Mere cavillers only can object to the familiarity of the language used in this passage.

sake.

sake. And he said unto him, O let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak : Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD : Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once : Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

Now, there is not a single circumstance in this history, which can lead us to conclude, that the Justice of God is repugnant to his merey, but only that it essentially belongs to him, as a just being, to make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and not to destroy the innocent with the guilty. Abraham intreated God not to punish, but to spare, to spare even the guilty, if it should seem good to his infinite wisdom, or, if they were found to be past hopes, to be incorrigibly hardened and impenitent, to vindicate his justice, by sending redemption to the righteous. Nor did the LORD threaten to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, because the inhabitants were imperfect creatures, or because they had fallen into involuntary errors, or because that, though they might be then penitent, they had formerly been wicked; but because that they were totally depraved, because they had irreclaimably given themselves up to the foulest vices that could be perpetrated or invented, and that no means of salvation that were offered them, could work a reformation in them, “ And
 “ the Lord said, because the cry of Sodom and
 “ Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very
 “ grievous, I will see whether they have done ac-
 “ cording

" cording to the cry of it that is come unto me." From which it may be concluded, that, if their sins had not been of the deepest dye, and such as admitted of no sort of extenuation; and had they not resolved to continue in them too, against all possible means of conviction, God would still have been gracious to them, and granted them a space for repentance. We learn accordingly, that, after the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had been greatly corrupted, sentence was not suddenly executed against them, but that Lot, on the contrary, was sent to sojourn among them, to reprove them for their impieties, and to admonish and persuade them, if possible, to repent and live: and it was not until they had rejected these means of grace, abused the divine forbearance and long-suffering, waxed still worse and worse, and wholly given themselves up to work all iniquity with greediness, that the impending judgments of God were let loose upon them. In his whole conduct towards this people, his justice did not at all interfere with his mercy, his justice did not hinder the calls of grace and reconciliation for a long time to take place; his mercy was extended towards them until the farther extension of it could be of no use to them; indeed until mercy and goodness to other nations rendered their destruction necessary. Abraham, therefore, did not address God, saying, that his justice required immediate vengeance upon all his adversaries, or that his justice was irreconcilable with his pardoning, or forbearing to punish, any criminal *, but that his justice could not suffer any evil to be-

* This, however, must have been his language, had he entertained the common shocking ideas of the divine justice, or any ideas of this divine attribute at all similar to these.

fal the righteous. " Abraham drew near and said,
 " Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the
 " wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous
 " within the city: wilt thou also destroy, and not
 " spare the place for the fifty righteous that are
 " therein? That be far from thee, to do after this
 " manner: and, that the righteous should be as
 " the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the
 " judge of all the earth do right?" Here, the line
 of justice is exactly drawn. And it has not, we see,
 the least respect to any kind of implacability in the
 Divine Mind, nor does it suppose that God cannot
freely pardon the truly penitent, in perfect consis-
 tency with the full exercise of his justice, but is
 wholly confined to this rule, that God will make a
 proper distinction between the righteous and the
 wicked, and that he will punish none more than
 their iniquities deserve. In other words, the Jus-
 tice of God signifies that he is a being of absolute
 and unchangeable rectitude, and that there is not
 the most distant shadow of any kind of injustice
 with him; or, as Moses describes him, cloathed
 with this attribute, that, *he is the rock, his work is*
perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of
truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.
 But here it should be particularly observed, (when
 we say that the Justice of God signifies that there
 is no *injustice* with him) that forgiveness of sin is
 not to be included in our idea of injustice: for, if
 it was, what should become of the whole universe
 of dependant beings? God chargeth his very an-
 gels with folly; and as to the rational beings in this
 world, *what man is he, that liveth and sinneth not?*
 If God was, therefore, strict to mark our iniqui-
 ties, or if his justice and pardoning mercy were
 at variance, misery must inevitably be the portion
 of

of the whole human race. But, it is our comfort, that God is not strict to mark our iniquities, that he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, that he is gracious, forbearing, and long-suffering towards us, and not willing that any should perish. It is our comfort that his justice is in no respect repugnant to his goodness, that his justice freely admitteth of the infinite riches of his grace, that his justice does not at all imply, that he is *an inflexibly rigorous judge*, but only, that, “ he will make a proper distinction between the righteous and the wicked, that he will not punish the wicked more than their iniquities deserve, that he will not disappoint the hopes, nor frustrate the expectations that he has raised in his creatures, and that he is no respecter of persons.”

In the first place, ‘ The Justice of God implies, that he will make a proper distinction between the righteous and the wicked.’ That the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from God? Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? It would be obviously wrong to slay the righteous with the wicked, or to put the wicked on a level with the righteous : and it would be more wrong still, it would be truly diabolical, to prefer any of the wicked to any of the righteous, and, merely to display his power, to introduce any of the wicked to a place of happiness, and to consign any of the righteous to a place of misery. God, therefore, as a just being, cannot admit the wicked to the joys of the righteous ; a distinction must take place, and a distinction among the righteous themselves, according as they severally have been more or less obedient to his voice. But, then, it can be no injustice to the righteous, to grant the wicked a space for repentance ; nay, to bear long
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with them, to see if they will turn from their evil ways, and to give them peace and reconciliation, when influenced by that wisdom which descended from above, and following the innate dictates of their own minds, they truly *seek the Lord and find him*. If this was injustice, the righteous themselves could have no hope; for they have not been always found perfect before God, they could, therefore, only look, in this case, for a less degree of punishment than would be inflicted on the wicked. But all the ends of justice must, it is obvious, be completely answered, by rewarding the righteous, according to their sincere though imperfect obedience, and by punishing the wicked, only when their punishment becomes necessary, when they become reprobate to every good work; when, therefore, farther forbearance towards them, not being sufficient to reform them, could be of no use to themselves, and might be cruelty to the rest of the creation.

Secondly, 'The Justice of God implies, that, he will not punish the wicked more than their iniquities deserve.' This is obvious, at first view: for, strict justice can never exceed in its sentence the proportion of guilt in any offender. God, therefore, as a just being, cannot punish us for what we could not do, nor for what we could not avoid doing, nor for any iniquities of others, to which we were no way accessory, nor consenting. On the contrary, as the most just of all beings, he may be long-suffering towards us, and delay his judgments until the ruin of the innocent would be the consequence of any farther delay; and, as the most holy of all beings, he may likewise graciously accept the returning penitent. How infinitely injurious is it to his justice, therefore, even to insinuate, that he will inflict endless torments

torments upon a very great majority of his creatures, for a crime that was committed before they existed, six thousand years before *many* of them existed, and that *there are millions of infants in hell not a span long*? I cannot so much as mention this doctrine of devils without the utmost horror. Nor should I mention it at all, it reflects such dishonour and reproach upon the children of men, to suppose that any individual of them is capable of believing it, was it not known that there are still some who zealously maintain and propagate it. Let such enjoy their sentiments, if they can. But, while reason and revelation have any influence upon the human mind, their God will be considered as a fictitious being, the work of a bewildered imagination, and as such will be discarded out of the world.

But, thirdly, 'The Justice of God requires, that he will not disappoint the hopes, nor frustrate the expectations which he has raised in his creatures.' Justice, even among mankind, requires, that we should perform all our obligations to the full; that, if we have made any promises, we should keep them, that, if we have cherished any particular confidence in us, if we have even encouraged offenders to hope for our favour, we should not cruelly deceive them. Therefore the Justice of God requires, that he will fulfil all those expectations which we are emboldened to form of his goodness. Though Justice could not oblige him to promise immortality to those who never deserved it; yet justice ensures immortality to the righteous after it is promised; and justice ensures pardon to the truly penitent, after they are once encouraged to hope for it at the throne of grace. Justice, therefore, must satisfy those desires of living beyond the

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grave,

grave, which for ever animate us, must crown us with unfading glory and honour, if we live up to the terms of the blessed gospel, must give us at all times free access to the throne of mercy, and crown all our *sincere* though *imperfect* endeavours, to humble ourselves before God, and to serve him in spirit and in truth, with all those rewards that are represented to us in the sacred treasury of his word. The apostle, therefore, says, 'God is not *unrighteous* to forget your labour of love;' signifying, that after God has encouraged us, by a patient continuance in well doing, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality, he cannot, consistently with his justice, disappoint the hopes of his faithful servants.

But, lastly, 'The Justice of God requires, that 'he should be no respecter of persons.' Justice, in the distribution of gifts or rewards, can only consider the worthiness or unworthiness of any particular person, cannot respect any one man in preference to any other man of exactly the same pretensions to favour. In the court of justice, the rich and the poor, the bond and the free, the prince and the peasant, must be upon the same common level. In the court of justice, there can be no taking of bribes, nor distinction of country, sect, or party. And, here, the good that we would have done but could not, must set us in the same light with those, who had the opportunity and ability, as well as the will to do the same good. God, therefore, as a just being, can have no favourites among his children, independently of their devotedness to his service. He cannot respect their persons, nor be biased by pompous appearances: but as he has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the whole earth, whether

whether you be Jew or Greek, ruler or subject, master or servant, born in the first or in the last ages of the world, it makes no difference in his eye. The only difference that he can make must arise from the different circumstances in which mankind have been placed. But, this difference he must make as no respecter of persons. He cannot require brick where there was no straw. He can only require a benevolent heart, where there is neither silver nor gold : and, he cannot judge those by the law, who had not the law, nor those by the gospel who had not the gospel. Where he has given ten talents, though there he must be expected to look for the improvement of ten ; yet, where he has given only five talents, he can only look for the improvement of five ; and, where he has given only two talents, he can only look for the improvement of two. In short, the equally sincere and upright in his service, all the advantages or disadvantages of their situation being considered, must be equally acceptable with him, and equally rewarded by him.

Having thus endeavoured to give the reader right apprehensions of the divine justice, and such as represent the great God to us, not in a forbidding, but in an amiable and endearing light, I shall now proceed to shew that the justice of God is, and must be such as I have here described it.

This I shall, first, endeavour to shew, upon the principles of reason, from his other perfections ; and, secondly, from the scriptural account of his dealings with the children of men.

There can, then, it is obvious, in the first place, be no temptation to injustice, but from dependency or want, or from motives of benefitting ourselves at the expence of others. God, therefore, being

being supremely exalted above all principalities and powers, the fountain of all being, the Lord of the whole creation, and possessing in himself an infinite and independant fullness of all possible blifs, and it being impossible that he can derive any benefit from the oppression, or total extinction of any, or of all his creatures : God, therefore, I say, cannot possibly do an unjust thing. As all men in common are equally his own offspring, so far he can make no distinction between them, but every one man must be as much the object of his care and bounty as every other man. And, as he could have no possible motive to create any being, but to make that being happy, he therefore cannot possibly take pleasure in the misery of any creature, nor suffer any creature to labour under oppression without sufficient reason, unless it be its own fault, or he should know perplexed and cloudy circumstances to be necessarily conducive to improve it in knowledge, virtue, and happiness. Farther, as the infinite mind must delight in those perfections in others which he exerciseth himself, must love his own image in his creatures, must approve of the grateful and upright heart, must consequently disapprove of the profane and disobedient wretch; he must, therefore, make a proper distinction between the righteous and the wicked, must crown the righteous with greater or with lesser dignity and glory, according to their several attainments in holiness and perfection, and must debar the wicked of the joys of the righteous. But, that the justice of God, at the same time, is in no case repugnant to his mercy, is demonstrable from our own existence, from the numberless unceasing blessings which we daily receive, and from the animating hopes, we are taught to entertain, of more enlarged com-

communications of the divine favour in a future scene. We know, that we have all sinned against him, and that if he should strictly deal with us *after our transgressions*, or determine not to pardon any of our trespasses against him, we must long ago have been consumed. We know, therefore, that his justice and mercy are not at variance, that his justice is consistent with his patience, forbearance, and long-suffering, that his justice can be slow to punish, and ready to pardon, and that it can spare the guilty themselves, until they have repeatedly rebelled against the divine laws, thrown off the divine government entirely, and rejected all those means of conviction and salvation, that could be reasonably extended towards them, or be reasonably expected from infinite benevolence. Once more, as the only end of deferring punishment can be the reformation of the offender, and as we have a relish for, and are taught to look forward to a future and everlasting state of happiness, upon our sincere though imperfect endeavours to serve God; God, therefore, because so great, so glorious, and independant a sovereign, could have no possible motives to mock the creatures of his power, but certainly intendeth us for such a state, and certainly will introduce us to such a state, if we make the best preparations in our power for it. Those hopes of the righteous, *those longings after immortality*, which his infinite goodness, without any claim or merit on our part, originally infused into the soul, his infinite justice must fully satisfy. He cannot, as the universal Father, and the all-sufficient God, disappoint any of those expectations which he has raised in his rational creatures. His justice, I say, must complete those views, and, if we live up to the dictates of his wisdom, satisfy those

those boundless desires with which his adorable and infinite goodness has inspired us.

These are the sentiments of reason upon this subject : and, in perfect harmony with these, are the history of God's dealings with the children of men from the beginning of the world, and the plain declaration of his revealed will, which are recorded for our instruction in the holy scriptures. The first man, Adam, experienced no kind of repugnancy between the divine justice and the divine mercy. It was said even to Cain, after he *was very wroth, and his countenance fell—If thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted?* Nay, the justice, which afterwards punished him for his great wickedness, admitted of the extension of mercy, upon his repentance ; and his punishment seems to have been purposely calculated to lead him to repentance. The doctrine, which I have been endeavouring to establish is still farther confirmed, from the history of David, Manasseh, and many other remarkable delinquents. But, as it would be an endless work, so it does not seem necessary to examine the divine dispensations towards each individual, whose virtues, or vices, or whose virtues and vices together, are held up to our observation in the scriptures. The history of the antediluvian world, the whole history of the Jews, from the beginning to end, the history of Nineveh and Babylon, and Tyre and Sidon, and the deplorable state of the world, when the man Christ Jesus revealed all the riches of God's grace to his most abandoned offspring, are all to my purpose. To my purpose likewise are the innate sentiments of the human mind, as these are successively represented to us in the scriptures. ‘ Doth God pervert judgment, says Bildad, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?’
 meaning,

Meaning, that God could not do an unjust thing. 'Is it good unto thee,' says Job, 'that thou should'st oppress? that thou should despise the work of thine hands? and shine upon the council of the wicked? He is excellent—in plenty of justice,' says Elihu; 'he will not afflict,' but according to wisdom and equity; 'and he shall judge the world in righteousness,' says the Psalmist, not meaning with rigour, but without injustice; 'he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness, The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name, will put their trust in thee; for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.' Again, the Psalmist says, 'Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face.' In like manner, God is represented, by the prophet Jeremiah, as proclaiming his own character, 'I am the LORD, who exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.' Here, *loving-kindness* can evidently bear no opposition to *righteousness* or *justice*, though God will make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and inflict tremendous punishments upon the incorrigibly wicked, according to the preceding and following verses. This is also the sentiment of Eliphaz, when he says. 'Shall mortal man be more just than his Maker?' Farther, the ideas which I endeavoured to convey of the *impartial* justice of God, are likewise uniformly handed down to us by the sacred penmen. 'He accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor,' *Job xxxiv. 19.* 'Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O D children

‘ children of Israel, saith the LORD.’ ‘ Of a truth I perceive, says Peter, that God is no respecter of persons.’ Paul repeatedly says the same thing, and asks the Romans, ‘ Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yea, of the Gentiles also.’ Again, that the Justice of God implies, that he will fulfil those expectations which he has raised in his creatures, is likewise expressly asserted in the scriptures. ‘ I will not leave thee,’ said he to Jacob, ‘ until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.’ ‘ Thy councils of old are faithfulness and truth,’ *Isa.* xxv. 1. ‘ All the promises of God in him, are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God,’ *2 Cor.* i. 20. ‘ The LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God,’ *Deuter.* vii. 9.

More testimonies from the sacred writings will come in our way as we proceed. At present we see that the scriptural accounts of the Justice of God, do not, any more than the positive deductions of Reason, represent him in a forbidding, but, on the contrary, in an endearing light, encourage our trust and confidence in him, and lead us, if we love him, and keep his commandments, to cast all our cares and burthens upon him. If we search the scriptures from beginning to end, we shall not meet with a single passage, which informs us, that he cannot pardon the least transgression without a proportionable recompence, but, on the contrary, that *he knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust*, that he will not, therefore, make a rigorous enquiry into our past transgressions, but that, *if we turn unto him, he will turn unto us*, and that, if the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he has committed, He will

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‘ vineyard. What could have been done more to
 ‘ my vineyard, that I have not done in it?’ Where
 he signifies, that the glory of his justice, consists in
 kindness and compassions, and in applying every
 reasonable means that can be offered for the reco-
 very and salvation of his back-sliding people.
 Words cannot more strongly express this sentiment
 than we find it in *Ezekiel* xviii. 25. ‘ Hear now,
 ‘ O house of Israel, is not my way equal?’ The
way, or *dispensation* of God referred to here, is
 that the children should not bear the iniquities of
 the fathers, that the soul which sinned alone should
 die, and that God has not any pleasure at all that
 the wicked should die, but rather that they should
 turn from their evil ways and live. Are not my
 ways equal? Am not I just? when, instead of pu-
 nishing one for the iniquities of another, or rigo-
 rously marking every iniquity committed against my
 authority, I am even willing to pardon all the
 transgressions, however enormous and inexcusable,
 of the truly penitent. But, as full a proof as can
 be given, that no implacability is to be included in
 our ideas of the divine justice, is to be drawn from
 the directions that are given us for our own con-
 duct. We learn, then, that to please God, we
 must not only do justly, but likewise love mercy,
 and exercise forgiveness. Now, here it is evident,
 that if, *to do justly*, was to punish with rigour every
 offence committed against us, then, if we would
 please God by doing justly, we could exercise no
 mercy or forgiveness. Doing justly, therefore, can
 only signify, that we do no violence ourselves, that
 we should deprive no fellow-creatures of their rights
 and privileges, but do unto all others as we would
 that they should do unto us. And, in this light we
 are to view the divine justice: it is slow to wrath,
 and

and keepeth the door of mercy for ever open to the penitent. 'Because God is LORD of all,' as the author of the Book of Wisdom says, 'it maketh him to be gracious to all.' And this *grace* is without respect of persons. He regardeth not the high more than the low, but, as the Apostle Peter says, 'In every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.' It is not, till after repeated trials, and men have been guilty of the most daring impieties, and become totally abandoned, that his judgments take place. He is not speedy in executing sentence upon them, but chasteneth them by little and little, that they might fly from the wrath to come. And, when he comes forth to judgment, we are told, and may be assured, that every mouth shall be stopped, and that none shall be able to accuse him of unrighteousness. 'He will judge the world in righteousness, and the people with equity.' When this grand and important day arrives, *salvation and glory, and honour and power*, shall be ascribed unto the Lord our God, for his true and righteous judgments; and, it will then be found, beyond all question, I dare say, that God inflicteth punishment even upon the incorrigibly wicked, not because his justice cannot pardon, but because mercy to the universe renders their punishment necessary, and because too, perhaps, there can be no way, consistent with infinite wisdom, of making the wicked happy. Besides, God, in punishing the wicked, will eminently display his justice, in proportioning the punishment of every particular criminal, to his lesser or greater degree of impenitency and hardness of heart. Those, that have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and while some are beaten with

with many stripes, others, comparatively speaking, shall be beaten with few stripes. 'With the judgment they judge, they shall be judged; and with the measure they mete, it shall be measured to them again.' The same justice also will display itself in rewarding the righteous. To some it will be said. *Come up hither.* He, that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully. While all shall be exempted from every labour, pain, and sorrow, the joy of some shall transcendentally exceed that of others. 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that have turned many to righteousness, and have been righteous themselves, as the stars for ever.' The Justice of God, will pardon all their infirmities, and all their transgressions, of which they have repented, that is, from which they have turned away; and, according to the works of righteousness, which they have done, *he will divide to each his portion.* His goodness has promised this. His justice therefore will bring it to pass. Yes, Though we have sinned, yet if we have forsaken our sins, acquired a new heart, and a new spirit, and approved ourselves holy in all manner of conversation and godliness; if, in preference to all the honours, and riches, and pleasures of the world, we have, by a patient continuance in well-doing, sought for glory and honour, and immortality, then, notwithstanding those doings that have not been good, and which we have seriously amended, God will grant us all we want, all the riches of eternal life. *He is not unrighteous,* as we have already affirmed with the apostle, *to forget our labour of love.* He is faithful in all his promises, and cannot disappoint those hopes, nor frustrate those noble expectations which he has raised. Nay, he will not only

only not frustrate those expectations, not only give us the victory over death and the grave, and introduce us to happiness, but, *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God has prepared for them that love him. Thy righteousness, O Lord, is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth. The heavens shall declare his righteousness; for God is judge himself. Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts.*

Such are the notions which reason and scripture, clearly, I think, lead us to form of the divine justice. A great variety of objections, however, it will possibly be said, may still be urged against it. With all my heart, say I, if the objections will go upon the same ground upon which I have endeavoured to tread, that is, if reason and scripture be the testimonies to which they appeal. But the most common objection to this doctrine, or the most common argument by which the contrary doctrine is supported, is nothing more than an impertinent quotation from the apostle Paul. A man rises up, and harangues to me, upon a multitude of *unintelligibles*, ascribes certain random, arbitrary decrees to the infinitely wise governor of the universe, then describes his justice to be such as I have shewn must be an absolute bar to mercy, and after working himself into a tolerable heat, by much speaking, *Who art thou, says he, that repliest against God?* Now, to such a reasoner I have only to say, *Infal-
lible Sir! though thou art a God to thyself, thou art not my God.* But farther, it cannot be seriously objected to the doctrine I have been vindicating, 'that the wicked frequently bear rule in this life,
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‘ and that their eyes stand out with fatness ; while
 ‘ the righteous are afflicted, and mourn, and some-
 ‘ times go down to the grave, labouring under the
 ‘ rod of oppression and sorrow.’ This, I say, cannot be seriously objected ; because this is the very nature of a state of trial. Besides, amply to satisfy us upon this head, it is enough to say, that all these things will be set right on a future day, and that, for every suffering, into which we have fallen for righteousness sake, or for the trial of our faith, we shall be infinitely recompenced at the resurrection of the just. Besides, we are often in our prosperity, too apt to forget God ; but adversity naturally leads us to the rock that is higher than we. The Psalmist, therefore, said, that it was good for him to have been afflicted, because that before he was afflicted, he went astray. Solomon says to the same purpose, ‘ My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction ; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.’ And, our own experience testifies, that scenes of sorrow naturally humble the mind, arrest our wandering desires, and dissipated thoughts, admonish us of our follies and transgressions, and point out to us our true duty and happiness, and our only refuge from every calamity. It would be unnecessary, I hope, to make a formal reply to many other equally frivolous objections, which the reader can answer as soon as they occur. I shall now, therefore, only conclude with some obvious reflections, which naturally arise from what has been said.

I would observe, first of all, that the Justice of God, as I have here endeavoured to represent it, is, like all his other perfections, glorious. It is not
 strict

strict to mark our iniquities. It admitteth of grace and reconciliation. It is founded on mercy and goodness. It is a security to the righteous, that they shall never be moved. And it is a pledge to the truly penitent of their future crown. It is, therefore, endearing, and adorable, our refuge in difficulties, our hope in trouble, our haven of rest from all the storms of life, and our tower of defence against every enemy, *while we incline our hearts unto the law, and to the testimonies* *.

But, secondly, we should learn, from this description of the divine justice, what ought to be the rules of justice among men. It should have no likeness, we see, to that narrow, unfeeling, vindictive spirit, which actuates the *priestly* magistrate, when the trembling wretch, who wanted a morsel of bread, is brought before him. It should exert its strength against tyranny and oppression, against villainy in power. And, if it should not be allowed, to pull down the despotic monarch from his throne, and should at the same time, most inconsistently, and unmercifully, wave its heavy scourge over the necessitous delinquent, it should not, however,

* ‘ The man, whose heart does not condemn him (says Abernethy) has a confidence toward God, because he is a perfectly just governor, by whom no service sincerely performed to him, nor instance of respect to his commandments, will ever be forgotten—a self-approving mind is naturally secure, supported by this persuasion, that right shall finally prevail in the universe, and therefore looks forward, without consternations, to the last result of things, when all irregularities shall be rectified, when the proud shall be no more prosperous, nor innocence oppressed, but all men shall receive according to their deeds done in the body, and not according to their outward actions only, but the prevalent affections, and purposes of their hearts.’ See the following note but one at the beginning.

transgress the boundaries of plain equity. But, it is manifestly unjust, it is most cruel, and iniquitous, to put the life of one man upon a level with the property of another, to murder the fellow-creature who, though wantonly, and must unjustifiably, and wickedly, hath made inroads upon the property of his neighbour. This is punishing beyond the utmost stretch of *rigour*, and much more beyond the line of *justice* *. And, the divine justice is so far from bearing any kind of similitude to this, that it is, we have seen, entirely contrary to it. The divine justice is slow to punish even sinners according to their deserts, is forbearing and long-suffering towards them, at first only punisheth them with the accusations of conscience, to try to reform them, time after time, useth every possible means to bring them back to their duty and obedience; and, if they will reform, cease to do evil, and learn to do well, is

* Ye shedders of blood, what motives can ye have, for still preaching up the doctrine of capital punishments, and putting your doctrine in practice? Ye cannot plead the prevention of crimes: for experience must convince you, that all your sanguinary laws are but a feeble fence against the worst crimes. And the reason of this is evident. Labour, and not death, is the great evil, which the malefactor dreads. Make, then, the malefactor work, and you will have no malefactors. Nor will ye then, while ye would be accounted the servants of Christ, most shamefully oppose, both the example and the laws of Christ. He came not to *destroy* men's lives, but to *save* them; not to deprive sinners of the power of repenting, but to call them to repentance. Farther, as lewdness, debauchery, and gambliug, *these works of dishonesty*, lead to the commission of all those other offences that disturb the peace of society; let not the example of those in superior stations countenance and encourage those destroying vices. Let those of distinguished rank, who are too often as eminently infamous, once shew themselves *men*, and they will find none but *men* among their inferiors.

ready

ready to blot out all their iniquities, to receive them into favour, and to admit them to the riches of eternal life. We should, therefore, to copy after the divine justice, proportion our mode of punishment to the offence that is committed; we should aim at the reformation of the sinner, and endeavour to make his situation such, as will both answer this end, and at the same time repay society for the wrongs he has done. Or, while we do *justly* towards all, and injure no man in body or estate, we should likewise shew *mercy* to the guilty, and forgive them when they repent*.

But, thirdly, from the view that we have here taken of the divine justice, we may see that there was none occasion for that infinite satisfaction for sin, which, among many other strange inventions, the busy children of men have found out, and still confidently proclaim to the world. The divine

* After the author had written these sheets, he turned to a discourse of the great Abernethy upon the same subject; from whom he has transcribed the following passage, being, in his apprehension, perfectly in point with the sentiments delivered in the above paragraph. 'God, in his justice,' said this most learned and excellent man, 'as well as his other moral perfections, is the best example for us to imitate, as far as the frailty of our nature will allow. It is our glory, as reasonable creatures, to be capable of imitating him; and as our consciences bear as full testimony to the rectitude of this, as to any other part of his law written in our hearts, we must be self-condemned, and therefore unhappy, in acting contrary to it.—The exercise of human authority, should, as exactly as possible, follow the pattern of that perfect righteousness that governs the world. Princes' and magistrates 'are called Gods upon earth—Shall they govern by arbitrary will, or by caprice and passion, instead of justice.' Shall they?—But, how shall we prevail with them, or those around them, to take the trouble of thinking what is right, or of amending what is wrong?

justice is surrounded with mercy. The divine justice, therefore, is fully satisfied with the reformation of the offender. The divine justice sitteth upon a throne of grace, to which every contrite sinner has free access, has *always* free access. And, if mercy was not to be obtained thence, where else could it possibly be found? Could any other being, could all the other beings, in the universe, overpower the infinite mind? Could any other being be more benevolent than he? Or, indeed, dare any other being presume to direct him, to alter the purpose he had formed? But there was not any occasion for any other being to attempt this. God was *of himself* eternally disposed to have mercy upon us, and was *never* willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and eternal life. Nay, so far was he from being irreconcilable to his creatures, or from demanding an infinite satisfaction for every sin, that he, *of his own will*, gave us his only begotten son, to assure us, that, upon our sincere repentance, all our sins should be blotted out, and that, upon our renewed obedience, we should be made partakers of eternal life. ‘God so loved the world, that he gave us his only begotten son, that whoever believeth in him, might not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Or, this is his covenant with us, *Repent, and live ye, and turn unto me, and I will turn unto you.* The blessed Christ has sealed, or ratified to us, this covenant with his own blood, that is, by his death and resurrection. The everlasting Jehovah, has raised Christ from the dead, to assure us, that he has sent him, and that he will, consequently, fulfil, to the truly penitent, all those promises of pardon, peace, and love, and everlasting salvation
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in the heavens, which are given to us in his holy word*.

* Why, if such a doctrine has any foundation in truth, have we no account in the scriptures of this infinite satisfaction for sin? Why, if this be necessary to salvation, is it not so much as mentioned in those books that are able to make us wise unto salvation? Why did not Nathan, when he was sent to David to display to him the pardoning mercy of God, refer him to such a satisfaction as the only means of escaping the wrath to come? Why did not David himself, when he humbled himself before God for his great transgression, rely upon any such satisfaction, nor speak of any such satisfaction, but pray for *a clean heart and a right spirit*? Why, after Christ died, did all the apostles, instead of referring sinners to such a satisfaction, teach them, *that denying ungodliness, and worldly lust, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*? Why did Paul in particular, who gloried so much in preaching Christ, expressly declare that *if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves are found sinners, we deceive ourselves*? Without shewing at large, that this notion of a satisfaction destroys all distinction of character, and expunges every idea of the malignity of evil, why did not our Lord himself, who was the true way to eternal life, ever recommend any other means of attaining the mercy of God, than a sincere repentance, and a thorough reformation? He certainly foreknew that he was to suffer death, and repeatedly intimated this to his disciples; but, in none of his conversations upon this subject, did he in the least insinuate that his death would be necessary to satisfy the justice of God, or that it was to be considered as an indispensable prerequisite to appease his wrath. Accordingly, he did not pray to God, that sinners might learn to rely upon the merits of his blood, but that the apostles might be kept from falling, and he prayed for all who should believe on him through their word. He likewise, in the last scene of all, prayed for very murderers—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. But, to what purpose any of these prayers, if the justice of God was fully satisfied by the death of his son? Our Lord would not then, surely, have prayed for criminals, but would, as he had the spirit above measure, and as he could not therefore be deceived, have demanded their forgiveness as his purchased right.

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But, finally, the doctrine we have been considering can afford no kind of encouragement to the sinner. On the contrary, the goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering of God, should, above all things, lead him to repentance. Besides, though God is gracious, slow to anger, and ready to forgive, yet he will at last take vengeance upon his adversaries, upon those who despised his grace, and rejected all the offers of his mercy. This he hath repeatedly, and solemnly declared, *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked: and, all the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed* *. Since these, then, are his declarations, since judgment will be his work, we may assure ourselves that infinite mercy will render judgment necessary, and that infinite goodness will execute all the threatenings denounced against the finally impenitent. And, oh, what an aggravation of the wretchedness of the sinners doom will it be, that infinite mercy itself could not save him!

Let us think of this; and as we know not what a day or a night may bring forth, let us now, in the accepted time, seek the Lord while he may be found, desire his favour better than life, and run with pleasure in the way of all his commandments; that we may hereafter receive those crowns which

* ‘ If any man serve me,’ says our Lord, ‘ let him follow me, and where I am, there also shall my servant be: If any man serve me, him will my Father honour—and, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ Paul says, accordingly, ‘ If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die,’ and, ‘ whoremongers and adulterers God will condemn.’ And John, and all the prophets and apostles teach, that ‘ he only who doeth righteousness is righteous,’ or shall find acceptance at the throne of grace.

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he has promised and prepared for those that love him, that we may drink for ever at the river of his pleasure.

Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small, and great.

Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him.

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad: let the sea roar and the fulness thereof; let the field be joyful, and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord; for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: HE SHALL JUDGE THE WORLD WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THE PEOPLE WITH HIS TRUTH.

F I N I S.

and that we may think for ever as the first of our

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